

A Qualitative Analysis of Leisure within Retired Older Adults due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the lives of all, impacting leisure, including that of retired older adults. The **purpose** of the study was to **examine the leisure behaviors of retired older adults before and during the pandemic** using the **Life Course Theory**.

Aim

Using the incorporation of the Life Course Theory which discusses how historical events shape social trajectories which can then influence a person’s development (Elder, G. H. 1998)

References: Elder, G. H. (1998). The Life Course as Developmental Theory. *Child Development*, 69(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1132065>

Methods

Participants:
44 retired participants aged 65-81 (M=68.23±5.39) in early 2021 across the U.S.

Program:
Eight focus group interviews were conducted online. They filled out an online questionnaire regarding their demographics, then attended one of the focus groups online.

Qualitative Measures:
The online recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using Life Course Theory.

Sample Focus Group Questions:
“Have you increased any of your leisure activities during the pandemic”, “Have your social activities changed during the pandemic?”

RESULTS

Qualitative Findings

Theme 1: Disruption of Leisure
Identified leisure activities being disrupted including canceling travel and other events.

“I used to belong to a bowling league, which we both every week, matter of fact, I was president of the league, and that stopped March 19, something like that, And I haven’t been back since.”

“And as far as travel goes, yeah. We used to make a trip from Florida up the coast. We would drive up to New England to see our family. And we haven’t been able to do that this year, either.”

Theme 2: Social Isolation
Highlighted significant increases in social isolation, especially isolation from family/friends during the pandemic.

“I would, I would say that, you know, the social aspect is probably the biggest difference, because, you know, we had, you know, a group of friends, that, you know, we would get together at their house, or, you know, we go out to dinner as a group, you know, almost every weekend...”

“You know, some things I think people may be, I'm hesitant to start that I won't talk about it, but I guess I'm hesitant to admit it. You know, I've never been married. So I've, you know, been alone, you know, for my whole life for the most part. So, even though that's the case I still get bouts of loneliness and, you know, I want to be able to go out and go to my family is in Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh, and I haven't been up there since last May.”

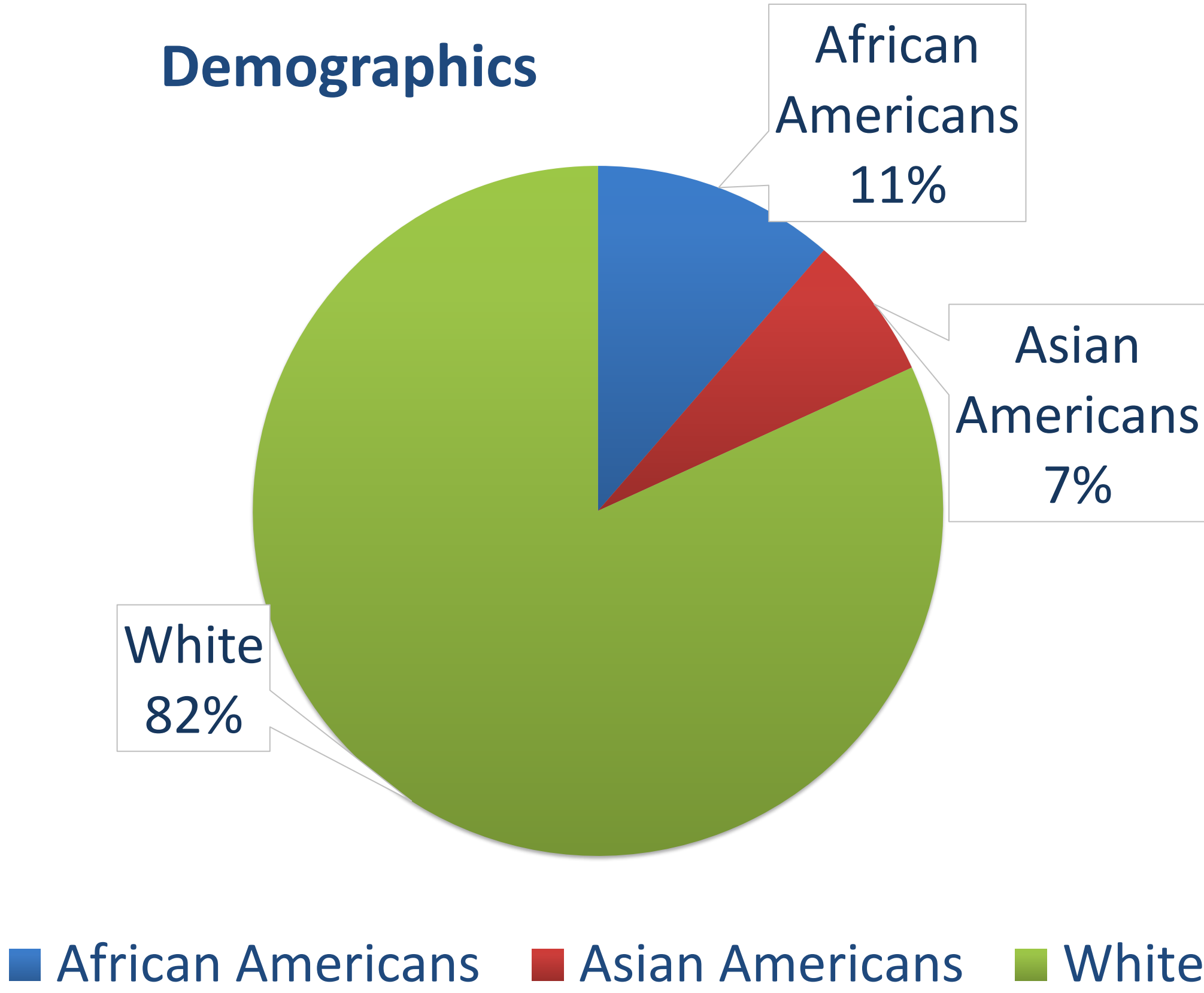
Theme 3: Adaptation
Participants shared how they adapted by focusing more on learning technology & outdoor leisure activities like walking, as that was all they could do safely.

“Well, actually I'm doing more fishing. More outdoor stuff, my wife lost her job. So, now we don't have to plan around her job. So, we go frequently, more frequent instead of once a month. This last year, we were going three or four times a month. Outside, out in the mountains, fishing, hiking stuff like that.”

“Well, I've been like, like I said, in the introduction, we've been walking more. And it started out like just something to kill time.”

“ Well, zoom is kind of one of those things. Learning how to do that and connect, you know, seeing family that I won't get to see in person for a while. We're not all that far apart. But, you know, we're all of a certain age, and we just would rather not. Take a chance. Right? Now we're, we're just being patient. And zoom is helping with that and learning some more this technology is kind of liberating in a way.”

Demographics



Conclusion

These findings emphasize how historical events can impact the leisure behaviors of retired older adults in different aspects. Future research should focus on leisure behaviors of retired older adults depending on their race, more specifically if people of color face more negative or positive leisure behaviors.

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